



Winter **2016**



Andy Hatch



Adeline Druart



Mateo Kehler



Soyoung Scanlan

## US Cheesemakers Gain Inspiration from Comté

The specialty cheese industry in the U.S. has grown considerably over the past three decades. Cheese stores now dot the country from coast to coast, giving consumers never-before-seen access to high quality imported and domestic cheeses, and there are a growing number of American cheesemakers producing excellent artisan cheeses. Comté has been influential to some of these cheesemakers, who have incorporated aspects of Comté's production process or its broader philosophy into their own cheese productions.

Adeline Druart, President of Vermont Creamery, grew up in the Franche-Comté, where Comté was served for both lunch and dinner daily. "Comté is my favorite cheese," she explains, "because the quality is remarkable and the flavor is nailed every time." Comté's attention to quality and consistency has influenced her work at Vermont Creamery. "We are constantly striving for the best quality and we always aim to be better. Comté is such a premium cheese with an artisanal production, but with scaled up opportunities—it shows that you can scale up a business but not compromise quality." She attributes this to the protection of Comté's cheesemaking method—in other words, its PDO regulations—which ensure that the cheese can be crafted again and again with the same standards.

Similarly, Soyoung Scanlan, owner of Andante Dairy, notes, "For me, Comté represents the highest level of quality regulations. It taught me that everything is related, and I've translated that into my operation." For instance, when she started making cheeses fifteen years ago, there was very little attention paid in the U.S. to the milk. "The Comté system, where everything is controlled, including milk collection and milk storage, was a revelation. I learned a lot about what it takes to create a high quality cheese."

For Andy Hatch, co-owner of Uplands Cheese Company, and Mateo Kehler, co-owner of Jasper

Hill Farm, their first visits (separately) to the Comté affinage caves ten years ago directly impacted their operations. Hatch explains, "It totally changed my perspective on ripening and especially on managing and selecting aged cheeses. The level of detail applied at such a large scale is still a big inspiration for me." The Comté affinage system influenced Kehler's development of Jasper Hill's aging cellars, as well as his company's broader philosophy. "We look at the Jura and the dairy economy that's built up around Comté as the Holy Grail," he explains. "It shows that cheese can maintain the vibrancy and wealth in a region. We're a social enterprise—we're looking at cheese as a way to conserve our local economy and our environment." Kehler is also developing a grading system adapted from the way value flows through the Comté chain, whereby all actors benefit according to quality.

Comté's flavor profile has also had an impact on these cheesemakers. Hatch notes, "Daphne [Zepos] said to me once that Comté is infinite, and I've come to regard my own cheese in that way, not because I think it's as good as Comté, but because I think the potential for variation and complexity in aged, raw-milk cheeses like these is endless. That approach has helped me look at variability as an inspiration and not a weakness, which sounds academic but is a very important mental construct." While Scanlan makes very different cheeses (soft cow's milk and goat's milk cheeses), Comté's diversity of flavors has influenced her style. "It's taught me how to refine flavor and add delicacy, while incorporating depth," she explicates.

While Comté has had the benefit of a ten-century-long learning curve, it's been amazing to see what American cheesemakers have accomplished in the past thirty years. The Comté Cheese Association is truly honored to have been an inspiration in this progression and hopes to continue the dialog with American cheesemakers for centuries to come.

### Comté ("con - TAY") cheese ID

#### General information:

**Origin:** Jura Mountains  
(Massif du Jura), France

**Milk Type:** Raw cow's milk

**Cheese Style:** Artisanal, pressed,  
cooked, with natural brushed rind.

**French AOC (Appellation d'Origine  
Contrôlée) since 1958 and European  
Union Protected Designation of  
Origin (PDO) Certification.**

- Delimited area of production: Doubs, Jura, Ain, elevation 650-5000 ft.
- Milk must be produced by local cows of the Montbéliarde (95%) and Simmental (5%) breeds. There are approximately 130,000 Comté cows.
- Minimum of 2.5 acres of natural pasture for each animal.
- Cattle feed must be natural and free of fermented products and GMOs.
- Each *fruitsière* must collect milk from dairy farms within a 16-mile diameter maximum.
- Milk must be made into cheese within 24 hours maximum of the earliest milking.
- Only natural starters must be used to transform the milk into curds.
- Wheels must be aged on spruce boards. Minimum aging is 4 months, generally 6-18 months and sometimes even longer.



**Comté Cheese Association**  
 will be at the Winter Fancy Food Show  
 in San Francisco, Jan 17-19th  
 BOOTH #3325

# Cathy Strange,

## Winner of the 2015 American Cheese Society Lifetime Achievement Award

*Cathy Strange, Global Cheese Buyer for Whole Foods Market, was the recipient of the 2015 American Cheese Society Lifetime Achievement Award. Strange has been a pivotal leader in the growth of the specialty cheese industry in the US, giving consumers never-before-seen access to high quality artisan cheeses, as well as fighting for the right of consumers to purchase raw milk cheese.*



American Cheese Society/MISA ME Photography

### **What changes have you observed in the specialty cheese industry over the past 20 years?**

The cheese industry has evolved to a highly complex and dedicated group. The cheesemakers are more creative and the industry is more knowledgeable. Great European cheeses have been available in the US for a period of time and the variety has grown and the quality is outstanding. Now, with the evolution of the domestic industry and the global economy, we have transparency in cheese production around the world and in our own back yard. It drives everyone to be on his or her game every day of the year. It is very exciting for all of us.

### **Why are you passionate about defending consumers' rights to purchase raw milk cheese?**

The production of cheese is highly regulated—raw milk cheesemaking in particular. This is a good thing. Cheesemaking is controlled throughout the entire process, and some of the techniques and expertise have been in use for over a thousand years. Furthermore, cheese is a fermented product with a very positive track record for being a safe food. Therefore, over-regulation seems extreme. Raw milk cheese is very different from fluid raw milk. If you check the history, the majority of issues with cheese can be attributed to post pasteurization contamination and on specific styles of cheeses (those with higher moisture).

### **What are your thoughts on the FDA's current scrutiny over raw milk cheeses?**

Our concern with over-regulation is that we may be looking in the wrong places. Take for example the latest assessment by the FDA and Health Canada. The FDA decided to include data on listeria from the 1980s, with outbreaks dating back to 1986. There seems to be no recognition that scientifically we have learned a lot about how to control pathogens and inhibit their presence in our food system. When we talk about E. Coli the situation is similar; we are regulating for non-toxicogenic E. Coli, which in fact has no correlation to disease since this bacteria is non pathogenic. We are encouraged by the request the FDA has issued and look forward to providing them with good examples of Best Practices already applied in our industry to ensure that our food systems remains healthy.

### **Tell me a bit about the Cheese of Choice Coalition, which you helped to found in 2000.**

The Cheese of Choice Coalition was an organization formed to protect the rights of people to consume cheese produced using unpasteurized milk. We have revamped the organization and it is now called Oldways Cheese Coalition [under the umbrella of Oldways, a nonprofit food and nutrition education organization founded in 1990]. The mission is the same, but we are now also focusing on more issues affecting artisanal cheeses. For further information: <http://www.oldwayscheese.org>

### **When and how did you become familiar with Comté?**

Comté was my first true classic French cheese experience. The taste reminded me of walking through a meadow in spring, smelling the flowers and being engulfed in the environment. At the time, I didn't know that that was called terroir, but I did understand the feeling and the taste of the "place." It was amazing. I have loved the product from that moment!

### **Have you ever visited the Comté region?**

Yes, and it is magnificent with the mountains and the valleys, the clean air, the healthy animals and the commitment to the cheese. It was the first time I saw the stomach of the calf being ground and put into the vat during production.

### **What's your favorite way to serve/eat Comté?**

Straight up with a twist! Really... on a toasted baguette slice with lemon zest.

### **What are some of your favorite ways of cooking with Comté?**

I like it shredded on vegetarian chili, in a cauliflower gratin, baked in rustic bread or used in spinach dip.

### **Do you have any favorite beverage pairings with Comté?**

Crisp white wines with nice mineral balance are my favorites; if they are from the Jura, even better. As for beer, I love Comté with light and delicate Belgian styles, which have herbal notes that highlight the buttery richness of the cheese.



# Two Twists on Classics

Comté stars in two outrageously delicious twists on classic dishes. Try J. Kenji Lopez-Alt's unique technique for a potato gratin with Comté from his new best-selling cookbook, *The Food Lab*, and for a killer take on a grilled cheese sandwich, Food 52's version with bacon and sweet fig jam is to die for!



## Cheesy Hasselback Potato Gratin

Recipe and photography from *The Food Lab: Better Home Cooking Through Science* by J. Kenji Lopez-Alt. Copyright © 2015 by J. Kenji Lopez-Alt. With permission of the publisher, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. All rights reserved.



3 ounces finely grated Comté  
2 ounces finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano  
2 cups heavy cream  
2 medium cloves garlic, minced  
1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves, roughly chopped  
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper  
4 to 4 ½ pounds russet potatoes, peeled and sliced 1/8-inch thick on a mandoline slicer (7 to 8 medium, see note)\*  
2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1. Adjust the oven rack to the middle position and preheat the oven to 400°F. Combine the cheeses in a large bowl. Transfer 1/3 of the cheese mixture to a separate bowl and set aside. Add the cream, garlic, and thyme to the cheese mixture. Season generously with salt and pepper. Add the potato slices and toss with your hands until every slice is coated with the cream mixture, making sure to separate any slices that are sticking together to get the cream mixture in between them.
2. Grease a 2-quart casserole dish with the butter. Pick up a handful of the potatoes, organizing them into a neat stack, and lay them in the casserole dish with their edges aligned vertically. Continue placing potatoes in the dish, working around the perimeter and into the center until all the potatoes have been added. The potatoes should be very tightly packed. If necessary, slice an additional potato, coat it with the cream mixture, and add it to the casserole. Pour the excess cheese/cream mixture evenly over the potatoes until the mixture comes halfway up the sides of the casserole. You may not need all the excess liquid.
3. Cover the dish tightly with foil and transfer to the oven. Bake for 30 minutes. Remove the foil and continue baking until the top is pale golden brown, about 30 minutes longer. Carefully remove from the oven, sprinkle with the remaining cheese, and return to the oven. Bake until deep golden brown and crisp on top, about 30 minutes longer. Remove from the oven, let rest for a few minutes, and serve.

\*Because of variation in the shape of potatoes, the amount of potato that will fit into a single casserole dish varies. Longer, thinner potatoes will fill a dish more than shorter, rounder potatoes. When purchasing potatoes, buy a few extra in order to fill the dish if necessary. Depending on exact shape and size of the potatoes and the casserole dish, you may not need all of the cream mixture.

## Fig & Bacon Grilled Cheese

Recipe by Campbell Cheese & Grocery and Food 52. [www.Food52.com](http://www.Food52.com)

Serves 1

4 pieces bacon, cooked (we recommend Benton's bacon)  
2 pieces sourdough or peasant bread  
1 tablespoon (heaped) fig jam  
1 tablespoon scallions, thinly sliced  
2 1/2 ounces Comté, grated  
1 teaspoon cultured butter

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. On a wire rack over a baking sheet, bake the bacon for 15 to 25 minutes, depending on thickness. Set aside. Note: If you don't have a wire rack, you can cover the baking sheet with parchment paper or foil instead.

3. Place a small skillet over medium heat. While waiting for the skillet to heat up, lightly butter both slices of sourdough and put them back to back, butter sides touching, before placing them on a cutting board. Spread the top slice of sourdough with fig jam, sprinkle with scallions, cover with bacon, and top with Comté.
4. Place the top slice, with all the ingredients on it, on the skillet, buttered side down. Top it with the second slice, buttered side up. Cook for 3 to 6 minutes, until cheese starts to melt. Flip and let cook 1 to 2 more minutes on the other side, until golden brown. Enjoy immediately!

## The Microbiology of Raw Milk

Towards a better understanding of the microbial ecosystems of milk and the factors that affect them



A multi-author book coordinated by Cécile Lathier (Institut d'Élevage)  
English edition edited by Bronwen Percival (Specialist Cheesemakers Association)  
Translated by Juliette Rogers

réseau  
Fromages de Terroirs

chaol  
CENTRE NATIONAL  
D'ANALYSE  
DES ALIMENTAIRE  
D'ORIGINE

SPÉCIALIST  
CHEESE  
MAKERS  
ASSOCIATION

## The Microbiology of Raw Milk Translated into English

The groundbreaking guide, *Microflore du Lait Cru*, written by a team of scientists in France, has been translated into English through the support of a Kickstarter campaign organized by Bronwen Percival of Neal's Yard Dairy and the UK Specialist Cheesemakers Association. The full-page, 125-page guide, which was printed in a single print run in English, reveals the scientists' findings about milk microbiology, showing evidence that the native microflora in raw milk influences flavor development in cheese and can even protect a cheese from contamination from pathogens. The guide offers practical information for cheesemakers, as well as best practices for preserving lactic microflora of interest to cheesemaking in raw milk. For more information about the book, contact [bronwen@nealsyarddairy.co.uk](mailto:bronwen@nealsyarddairy.co.uk).



## Comté Scholarship Winner Announced

Devin Lamma, a fifteen-year Whole Foods Market veteran as well as a cheese educator, was awarded the fourth annual Comté Scholarship for American Cheese Society Certified Cheese Professionals™ (ACS CCPs™). Lamma's essay took the top score in the blind essay contest, which was judged by three renowned cheese experts: Peggy Smith (Board President of the American Cheese Society and Co-Founder of Cowgirl Creamery), Cathy Strange (Global Cheese Buyer of Whole Foods Market) and Max McCalman (Maître Fromager, Author, Speaker, Consultant and Educator). Lamma states, "I am thrilled and delighted to represent the ACS CCPs next year in France. It is my hope to learn the details of the Comté making experience and provide the beauty of the process to my classes in Denver." Second place went to Malachy Egan, Head Cheesemonger at the Franklin Market Di Bruno Brothers location in Philadelphia.

Lamma's winning essay can be read at: <http://www.comte-usa.com/files/15CCPScholarshipWinningEssay.pdf>

## Winter Fancy Food Show

The Comté Cheese Association will be at the Winter Fancy Food Show in San Francisco from January 17-19. Please stop by our booth #3325 to meet with Comté representatives, featuring Anais Nevers of the Comité Interprofessionnel de Gestion du Comté (CIGC). You can also taste Comté, as well as learn more about our educational and point-of-sale materials. We hope to see you there!

## The Comté Cheese Association

provides you with everything you need for a successful selling program, including: recipe booklets, brochures, aprons, demo toothpicks, training tools and more. Visit [www.comte-usa.com](http://www.comte-usa.com) for POS materials and free downloads.

## Comté Cheese Association, representing the Comté PDO in the US

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